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6 NOVEMBER 1997

Zambia: torture should not be allowed

Amnesty International today strongly condemned the torture and ill-treatment over the past week of a prominent opposition leader and up to 33 other detainees arrested in connection with last week's attempted coup d'état.

"The attempted coup cannot be used as an excuse to inflict this cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment," Amnesty International said today. "Under no circumstances can the infliction of cigarette burns, beatings and electric shocks be justified."

Zambia Democratic Congress President Dean Mungomba confirmed to his lawyer today that he had been tortured by police interrogators since his arrest on 31 October, and had been denied food and water until his court appearance on Tuesday 4 November. Witnesses said that Mung'omba had cuts and bruises on his legs, arms and hands. His lower eyelids showed bruising, and the backs of his hands bore marks of cigarette burns.

Amnesty International is calling on the Zambian authorities to take immediate steps to stop the torture, to investigate the reports and prosecute those responsible, and to allow the detainees immediate access to their families, legal counsel, medical care and representatives of human rights and humanitarian organizations."

Mung'omba described to his lawyer how he was suspended from a metal bar by his handcuffed hands and rope-tied legs, then beaten by police officers in a common torture method called "the swing". He also described being tortured by electric shocks applied to his metal handcuffs. After each incident of torture, Mung'omba was then interrogated for up to 18 hours continuously about his alleged connection to the attempted coup d'état. According to his lawyer: Robert Simenza: "*He was in such pain he cried like a baby and when the pain left he didn't even know what was going on*".

When he appeared in the Zambian High Court on 4 November, Judge Timothy Kabaleta yesterday granted an appeal by Dean Mungomba for his medical treatment. He was also moved to Lusaka Central Prison, where he will be kept in detention until a further hearing on 12 November on his challenge of the legality of his detention.

Police have served Mung'omba with a 28-day detention order under the State of Emergency legislation, which was approved by Zambia's parliament on Tuesday and extended for three months. The state of emergency declaration gives the police sweeping powers to detain anyone they believe might have been involved in plotting the coup.

An estimated 33 other detainees were also tortured in three torture rooms at the Central Police Headquarters in Lusaka. The military officers detained in connection with the attempted coup d'état apparently do not have legal representation at this point. No charges have been publicly announced in their cases, nor have they appeared in court. Many of the military detainees have also been denied food and water since their arrest last week. ENDS.../